



May 1953

## Letters of Henry James: Transcribed from the original manuscripts in the Colby College Library

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### Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 3, no.10, May 1953, p.152-164

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*Yours till death -  
Henry James*

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH IN THE COLLAMORE COLLECTION

# Colby Library Quarterly

Series III

May 1953

No. 10

## LETTERS OF HENRY JAMES

Transcribed from the original manuscripts in  
the Colby College Library  
and edited by

RICHARD C. HARRIER

THE HENRY JAMES Collection presented to the Colby College Library by Mr. H. B. Collamore has been mentioned in these pages a number of times in the course of the past six years. The initial announcement of the gift was made in February, 1947; additions to it were acknowledged in February, 1948; a unique copy of *The Point of View* was described in August, 1948; and a letter from James to the actress Marion Terry was quoted in our issue for May, 1951.

This is, however, not the only James letter in the Collamore Collection, and students of the novelist may find the other letters from his pen of interest and value. I have, therefore, transcribed them here, and have accompanied them with explanatory notes whenever they seemed to need such treatment.\*

After five years of residence in London, James visited America in the winter of 1881. His mother died suddenly in February, 1882; and, even more tragically, James returned to London for the summer only to be summoned home in December by news that his father was seriously ill. James arrived too late. Although he was occupied with family affairs for the next seven months, James did not

\* These letters are here printed by special permission of Mr. William James, of Stone Wall, Chocorua, New Hampshire.

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neglect his career or his friends abroad. To one of the new friends he had made during his sojourn in London in 1882, the critic and poet Edmund Gosse, he wrote:

131 Mount Vernon St.  
Boston, April 2d. [1883]

My dear Gosse,

I ought already to have thanked you for the *Viol and Flute*, which your American publishers sent me down [a] fortnight ago. But I waited, so that I might read the book, which I have now done, with much satisfaction. It seems to me full of art and feeling and fancy, and all sorts of things which I, who never in my life succeeded in turning a couplet, consider with admiration, wonder and envy. It is very modern, as we say, now a days; too modern I almost think, for poetry—which should always be at a certain distance from us—that is, behind us. Your subjects are antique, but your ingenuity is of the present—which makes me wish all the more that I had but a fraction of it. I am almost terrified by your “culture.” Still, I venture to thank you again, familiarly.

I hardly know when to think I shall see you. It is probable I shall not leave America before midsummer, and at that time you will be botanizing or poetizing by some eligible stream. But I shall look you up with the return of the dusky season.

I hope you hear sometimes from Howells, from whom I have received but one short note, with no information (to speak of) about himself. I shall be sorry to be absent from London during the weeks that he (as I suppose) intends to pass there. I delegate you, that is, would if I dared, my paternal duties toward him. I will repay you later. I hope your winter has passed happily, and remain with kind remembrances to Mrs. Gosse—

Yours very truly  
H JAMES



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On April 8, 1883, the novelist recorded in his notebook the plot of *The Bostonians*, which he had just outlined in a letter to his Boston publisher, James Ripley Osgood.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter James proposed two other volumes to Osgood.

Washington, Wormley's Hotel  
April 19th 1883.

Dear Mr. Osgood,

I think I shall be willing to publish a vol. of essays, *after* three or four which are latent in the *Century* shall have had time to appear. In fact I shall then have material for two vols.—different books, I mean—even without printing everything (that has appeared the last six years in magazines.) To consider only one, however, to begin with, it would not be able to be a series of critical papers (on authors) simply—for I haven't enough of these; it would have to be essays and sketches (as you say) commingled. For instance: (I don't set them in their absolute order:)<sup>2</sup>

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1 Sainte-Beuve (From N.A. Review.).           |           |
| 2 Alph. Daudet.                               |           |
| 3 Anthony Trollope.                           | } Century |
| 4 Carlyle and Emerson.                        |           |
| 5 Du Maurier.                                 |           |
| 6 Eugène Delacroix—N.A. Review.               |           |
| 7 Tommaso Salvini—Atlantic                    |           |
| 8 Venice—Century.                             |           |
| 9 Washington in Spring (promised to Century). |           |
| 10 Americans in Europe—Nation.                |           |

As regards another possible volume, I have produced during the last six years a good many sketches of places and things (English, French and Italian) which are buried in old Atlantics, Galaxys, Lippincotts, Nations and N. Y. Tribunes. A collection of these would be feasible and I think, entertaining. The trouble is that the best of these

<sup>1</sup> See F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., *The Notebooks of Henry James* (New York, 1947), pp. 46, 47.

<sup>2</sup> The works listed here were never published together.

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things are the sketches of England—which motives of delicacy absolutely prohibit my reprinting, *in toto*, at present. But I think I could reprint portions of them (the flattering ones!) and there would be more than enough of the other papers. This however we have time to discuss.

I should propose to call the *other* volume (contents enumerated) either *Studies and Sketches* or “Impressions of Art and Life.” There is a name I should like best of all, *i.e.* simply “Superficial Impressions.” It would be so modest! My only hesitation about it is that it might possibly be too much so. But I think not.

I enclose you part of a letter I have just received from Frederick Macmillan. My purpose in doing so is 1° to show you (*vide* the 3d page) that you may dispose to advantage of “Lady Barberina” in England if the *Century* doesn’t want it (which however I think it does;) and 2d to let you see that the arrangement I have made with you with regard to my two next books will be a source of profit to you in that country even greater than I believed when I last saw you: that is, of course, I mean, if you eventually arrange with the Macmillans to include the said two books in the 18 penny edition which F[rederick] M[acmillan] proposes. I have given my consent to their terms [?] for what relates to my past production and notified F.M. that my two next ones are to be your property.

I am afraid I am not prepared to say definitely at present what the two short stories which are to go with *Lady B[arberina]* will consist of. I have the subjects of a couple of dozen tales of that length noted down—but I really can’t declare which of them I shall some weeks hence feel most like working up. It seems to me that the Editor of any periodical ought to be ready to take a short story of mine not because it has been described to him, but because it is mine. However, on Gilder’s<sup>3</sup> asking me the other day to

<sup>3</sup> Richard W. Gilder, editor of the *Century*.

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specify (if convenient) these two short things, I related the plot of one I should *probably* write, which was to be called "The Impressions of a Cousin";<sup>4</sup> (I am afraid I haven't time to go over it here and now.) and told him that the other would (also probably, but not certainly,) be an episode in the lives of a group of contemporary "aesthetes," the former American, the other "international."

The latter, briefly, is the history of an American aesthete (or possibly an English one,) who conceives a violent admiration for a French aesthete (a contemporary novelist,) and goes to Paris to make his acquaintance; where he finds that his Frenchman is so much more thorough going a specimen of the day than himself, that he is appalled and returns to Philistinism. Or else (I haven't settled it) he is to discover that the Frenchman who is so Swinburnian in his (verses) [deleted] writings, is a regular quiet *bourgeois* in his life; which operates upon the aesthete as a terrible disillusionment. I may add that there will be a woman in the case. The idea of the thing is to show a contrast between the modern aesthete, who poses for artistic feelings, but is very hollow, and the real artist—who is immensely different. But I only mention this as a theme I *may* use: perhaps I shall take another.

I go to New York (same address) on the 25th, and to Boston on the 30th.

Ever yours  
H. JAMES

[To this letter James added a leaf on which he listed for Osgood the "sketches of places and things" which would make an "entertaining" volume:]

<sup>4</sup> This story was published in the *Century* during the last two months of 1883 and was reprinted with "Lady Barberina" and "A New England Winter" in *Tales of Three Cities*, 1884.

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- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 Venice.                        | 13 Three Excursions.                       |
| 2 An Italian Autumn.             | 14 In Warwickshire.                        |
| 3 Paris Revisited.               | 15 English Vignettes.                      |
| 4 From Normandy to the Pyrenees. | 16 An English Winter Wat-<br>tering Place. |
| 5 Chartres.                      | 17 An English Christmas.                   |
| 6 Rouen.                         | 18x The British Soldier                    |
| 7 Etretat.                       | 19 In Scotland.                            |
| 8 Rheims and Laon.               | 20 Americans Abroad.                       |
| 9 An English Easter.             | x Saratoga.                                |
| 10 The Suburbs of London.        | x Newport.                                 |
| 11 London at Midsummer.          | x Quebec.                                  |
| 12 Abbeys and Castles.           | x Niagara.                                 |

I propose to call the volume "Studies in Local Colour,"<sup>5</sup> until I think of something better: I put the Venice first, though the subject is rather threadbare, because the article is the best.

In August, 1883, James sailed back to England and did not return to America for more than twenty years. He first kept his residence at 3 Bolton Street, London, just off Piccadilly, and it was from this place that he wrote the letter I am to quote next. It, too, was written to Edmund Gosse. Two years previously, after a visit to Paris, Gosse had begun to do art criticism and continued this activity for a few years. To judge by the following letter, he was planning a trip to Dublin with R. W. Gilder and wanted James to go along for a gallery tour.

3 Bolton St. W.  
Nov. 7th 1883

My dear Gosse,

You and Gilder and the pictures (partially) make a seduction; but I am afraid not an irresistible one. I don't see my way to [go to] Dublin within any appreciable period, and I hesitate much to make an engagement which will hang over my head for months and give me bad dreams of

<sup>5</sup> The volume was finally titled *Portraits of Places*, published in London, 1883, by Macmillan and in Boston, 1884, by James R. Osgood. Of James's list only numbers 10, 18-20 did not appear in the volume. James X'd the American sketches apparently because he thought they were unwanted.

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printer's devils with a violent brogue. I don't think that *for Dublin* I should be first-rate. (Observe the limited character of that emphasis.) Please therefore excuse me—unless you can postpone the thing till next summer, which isn't likely. I shall console you for my inflexibility the next time I see you—which will be the first Sunday I don't go out of town.

Yours very faithfully

HENRY JAMES

The bad dreams of printer's devils not only kept James at work in England but also eventually drove him away from London, for he soon found that the seclusion necessary for writing had to be sought elsewhere.

Dover, 15 Esplanade

Sept. 9th [1884]

My dear Gosse,

Being in town for a few hours yesterday I found your poetical tribute to Dr. Holmes<sup>6</sup> which you had been so kind as to send me (it hadn't been forwarded) and which I read with much applause. It is charmingly ingenious, very felicitous, quite true enough, and altogether a very pretty idea very prettily rendered. It will tickle the old man in his tenderest part, and he will embrace you, in Boston—if fate is still to carry you there.<sup>7</sup>

I am immersed in unsociable seclusion, and (I am happy to say) sadly belated work at this agreeably-dull little place, where I have a delicious absence of acquaintance and a still more delicious presence of leisure for a pressing task.<sup>8</sup> I shall remain here (unless bad weather drives me away) for the greater part of this month. I wonder whether you wouldn't come down and spend 36 hours with me? I can offer you a lonely cot and a simple, wholesome vic-

<sup>6</sup> "An Epistle to Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, On His Seventy-fifth Birthday, August 29, 1884." See Gosse's *Collected Poems* (London, 1911), pp. 170, 171.

<sup>7</sup> Gosse arrived in the U. S. A. about November 30, 1884.

<sup>8</sup> The task was probably the writing of *The Bostonians*.

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tual, in short, a very modest but very cordial hospitality. Almost any date would suit me.

I fear you are in town (from something you said to me of your plans) pegging away at lectures and much driven by the same. Kindly remind me of your date of sailing for the U.S. I must see you before that, even if it be sooner than I suppose (my supposition placing it in *November*.) I hope you are well—and “sustained” under pressure. Thanks again for the elegant verses—I envy you your rhyming touch.

Yours ever

H. JAMES

I have been unable to identify the “young man” mentioned in the following letter to Gosse.

3 Bolton Street  
June 29th [1885]

Dear Gosse,

I am greatly obliged to you for seconding my young man in the face of your scruples, and feel that my request was truly indiscreet. When I made it I had not the least idea it was irregular—or of course I would have foreborne. I supposed that seconding (for a short introduction) was a mere matter of form, and that knowing the proposer, for the seconder, was tantamount to knowing the individual invited. This is the case at the Reform [Club], where my limited observation of club-manners has mainly been acquired, and where, since I have been a member, no one that I have proposed has (so far as I recollect) been seen either before or after by the member seconding. In a smaller club, however, it doubtless matters more—as it should do, and I shall be more regular in [the] future. Thanks again for your stretching the point. My invit   shall be taught to dissimulate—or rather, to simulate, and I think I can promise you that no catastrophe will ensue.

I was just about to answer your note about Sunday next. I have promised to pay about—“29 distinct damnations,”

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as Browning says,<sup>9</sup> on that afternoon—but am not without hope of arriving, more blessedly, at Delamere Terrace,<sup>10</sup> somewhat latish. I will bring Sargent<sup>11</sup> if I can put my hand on him, and at any rate you must come and meet him at dinner as soon as I can get him to name a day. I will then propose it to you.

Yours Ever

HENRY JAMES

The following brief letters are further evidence of James's friendship with the Gosses.

3 Bolton St. W.

Nov. 8th [1883-1886]

Dear Mrs. Gosse,

Your note is most kind, but alas it is based on a misapprehension of *my* note to your husband. It is a tale of bondage—not of freedom—that I related to him. I go out of town on Sunday a.m. next to remain till Monday, and I pay similar visits on the next two or three Sundays. But I shall keep in, after that, religiously (if that is the word for the day) and dedicate it to the house of Gosse. With many thanks and regrets

Very truly yours

HENRY JAMES

34, DE VERE GARDENS. W. Sunday night  
[1886-1897]

My dear Gosse,

I haven't seen you for a hundred years—so that I feel that I am taking rather a leap in the dark in asking you if you are to be at home either tomorrow, Tuesday or Wednesday night?—so weaned am I from a sense of your potentialities. Let me come and woo it back (*cela me manque*) on either of those nights that you may be at liberty. May I

<sup>9</sup> "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," line 51.

<sup>10</sup> Gosse's residence was at 29 Delamere Terrace.

<sup>11</sup> John Singer Sargent moved to London early in 1885, to 13 Tite Street, Whistler's old address.



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have a line by early post tomorrow? Many things to Mrs. Gosse. I have a list of subjects as long as my arm.

Yours ever

HENRY JAMES

REFORM CLUB.

PALL MALL. S.W.

Tuesday night

[1895?]

My dear Gosse,

I came up tonight and I go tomorrow, Wednesday, so invidiously, to Torquay. I want much to see you, even for 5 minutes—and the only way seems to be for me to wonder if you could conceivably, as it were, en route for Whitehall,<sup>12</sup> look in at Paddington station between 11 and 11.30. I take the Torquay express at the latter hour, and shall be there on the chance of your being able to come at the former. Indeed if this makes you too late for W[hitehall] I will be there on the platform of [the] train, from 10.40. Ten minutes is better than nothing if you can manage it. (Ten minutes are better than nothing if you can manage it. Behold, in sweet [?] iteration—an effect of an addled brain.) Seek me within the magic circle of the first class carriages, and believe me ever

HENRY JAMES

One would like to know the title of the work which the following letter indicates Gosse sent to James for perusal, but it is clear that James was more thrilled by one of William Archer's translations of Ibsen. James is referring to either *Little Eyolf* (1895, 1897), or *John Gabriel Borkman* (1897).

34 DE VERE GARDENS. W.

Wednesday [1895-1897]

My dear Gosse,

It was kind of you to send this and I return it conscientiously. I have read it with pleasure and a greater reali-

<sup>12</sup> Gosse was translator to the Board of Trade, with offices in Whitehall from 1875 to 1904. See Evan Charteris, *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse* (New York, 1931), pp. 77, 504.

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zation of the poor little man's distinction. With what taste, dignity, and competence it's written—and how one likes a little intelligent emotion! How charming too poor little Mary's (verses) [deleted] lines at the end!

Shall you be, by a miracle, at home, without company, *Saturday*, at 9? If so I will come. Heinemann has just sent me an act and a half of W[illiam] A[rcher]'s translation of the new Ibsen—and I'm in the seventh heaven of admiration. It is beyond *Ghosts*, even I must *talk* of it to some one—and can only to you! So do beckon me.

Yours entirely

HENRY JAMES

In 1905 Gosse and William Rothenstein obtained a Civil List pension for Joseph Conrad, who was then in financial trouble. James was moved by this act of generosity.

LAMB HOUSE

RYE, SUSSEX

My dear Gosse,

July 11th 1905

I rejoice more than I can say in the news you give me about the grant to J[oseph] C[onrad]—nor can I tell you, either, how I applaud, esteem, venerate you for the noble energy with which you put these things through. It does me good. It will also do me good if you are by any chance to be home *Monday* night next, [the] 14th. Then would I come in for a day or two. Forgive my confusion—I am not drunk, save perhaps with satisfaction. I mean come in at 9—being about to be in town for a day or two. If you are not, 2 words on a postcard at [the] Reform Club would light the uncertain path of

yours always

HENRY JAMES

James wrote a thoughtful "postscript" to the following letter after sending it off to Edmund Gosse.<sup>13</sup> The "young Elizabeth" of the letter is a mystery. She may be Mrs. Joseph Pennell, to whom Gosse was

<sup>13</sup> See Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (2 vols., New York, 1920), II, 430.

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still writing in 1917.<sup>14</sup> On January 18, 1911, James wrote a warm letter to possibly the same "dear Elizabeth."<sup>15</sup>

[Telephone:] 2417 Kensington

21, CARLYLE MANSIONS,  
CHEYNE WALK, S. W.

December 17th 1914

My dear Gosse,

I am very sorry that your kind invitation does find me, as it happens, definitely committed for Xmas night—when I am to owe my dinner to the benevolence of my next-door neighbor here, Emily Sargent (and her brother John.) Please express to Mrs. Nelly my melancholy regret for this *gaucherie*.

To make up for it a little I am writing to the young Elizabeth—who appears to have an impression of spacious times, or time, on the part of each of us, that her great original can scarce have attained to—that I *will* try to lash my extinct imagination into five minutes life for her sweet sake, and the cause's—and yours.

Yours all faithfully

HENRY JAMES



### HENRY JAMES AND STEVENSON DISCUSS "VILE" TESS

By DAN H. LAURENCE  
*New York University*

**H**ARDY's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was the subject of discussion by Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson in 1892 and 1893. This fact is not news, nor is it news that the two writers did not approve of the novel. But it is news that the full text of their remarks has never been published, strange though that fact may seem. When the novel

<sup>14</sup> Charteris, *Life and Letters of Gosse*, p. 409.

<sup>15</sup> See the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY, I (1943), 41.